

Department of the Interior  
U.S. Fish & Wildlife Service  
Nevada Fish and Wildlife Office  
1340 Financial Boulevard, Suite 234  
Reno, Nevada 89502-7147  
Phone: 775/861-6300  
Fax: 775/861-6301

# News Release



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Contact: Bob Williams, Reno, Nevada 775/861-6300

## **U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service Announces Availability of Draft Recovery Plan for Jarbidge River Population of Bull Trout**

Today, the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service published a Notice of Availability for its draft recovery plan for the Jarbidge River population of bull trout in Idaho and Nevada.

The Jarbidge River population includes six local populations of bull trout in the Jarbidge River watershed: the East Fork Jarbidge River (including the East Fork headwaters, Cougar Creek, and Fall Creek); West Fork Jarbidge River (including Sawmill Creek); Dave Creek; Jack Creek; Pine Creek; and Slide Creek. These local populations, as well as migratory bull trout in the mainstem river, are considered to be quite low in abundance and at risk of disappearing.

Bull trout are protected as a threatened species under the Federal Endangered Species Act throughout their U.S. range, which includes parts of Oregon, Washington, Idaho, Montana, and Nevada. A 5-year review of the species' listing classification also is underway and today, in a separate action, the Service announced it is extending the public comment period on the 5-year review until January, 3, 2005. The 5-year review will look at all new information about bull trout that has become available since the species was listed for Federal protection in 1999.

The draft recovery plan released today contains recommendations for recovering bull trout in the Jarbidge and Bruneau River watersheds, which are tributary to the Snake River. The Jarbidge River Recovery Team estimates that fewer than 500 resident and migratory bull trout occur in this area, with approximately 50 to 125 adults spawning each year. This population is genetically distinct and physically isolated from other bull trout populations by barriers (*e.g.*, dams) and represents the current southern-most range of the species. Despite the population's isolation, the Recovery Team advises against removing existing barriers to connectivity due to a substantial threat of invasions by non-native fish species, which could cause adverse effects and prevent bull trout recovery.

Bull trout populations in this area have been affected to varying extents by both historical and current land use activities, including dams and diversion structures, forest management practices, fisheries

management, livestock grazing, road construction and maintenance, increasing water temperatures, recreation, habitat fragmentation, mining, and residential development.

Recovering bull trout will require reducing the threats to the long-term persistence of the populations and their habitats, ensuring the security of multiple interacting groups of bull trout, and providing habitat conditions and access to them that allow for the expression of various life history forms. Among the recovery actions needed are the restoration and protection of habitat, fisheries management that eliminates threats from non-native fish, additional research on bull trout genetics and conservation measures, and cooperation with existing conservation programs and regulations to protect habitat. The Service estimates that recovery could take up to 25 years, if all recommended actions are implemented.

“Bull trout recovery, like salmon recovery, will require unprecedented partnerships and patience on the part of citizens and government agencies,” said Dave Allen, Regional Director of the Service’s Pacific Region. “We are showing the nation what an area can do when it cares so much about its natural and cultural resources.”

The Jarbidge River population of bull trout was listed as a threatened species on November 1, 1999 (64FR58910). There are five populations of bull trout in the lower 48 states, all of which are listed as threatened. In addition to the Jarbidge River basin, the populations occur in the Columbia River Basin, the Klamath River Basin, the Coastal-Puget Sound area of Washington, and the St. Mary and Belly Rivers in Montana.

Today, the Service also released a draft recovery plan for the Coastal-Puget Sound populations of bull trout. Draft recovery plans for the Columbia River, Klamath River and St. Mary-Belly populations were released in November 2002.

On June 25, 2004, critical habitat was proposed for the Jarbidge River, Coastal-Puget Sound, and St. Mary-Belly populations of bull trout. Critical habitat was proposed in November 2002 for the Columbia River and Klamath River populations.

The critical habitat proposals and the draft recovery plans are closely linked. However, critical habitat is designed to provide for the conservation of a species in areas that require special management, whereas a recovery plan is a much larger blueprint providing guidance for the recovery and eventual delisting of a species. More discussion of recovery objectives can be found in the accompanying Recovery Question and Answer document. Recovery plans are advisory only and carry no regulatory authority.

Bull trout are members of the char subgroup of the salmon family. They require very cold, clean water to thrive and are excellent indicators of water quality and stream health. Char have light-colored spots on a darker background, reversing the dark-spots-on-light-background pattern of trout and salmon. Bull trout have a large, flattened head and pale-yellow to crimson body spots on an olive green to brown background. They lack teeth in the roof of the mouth.

Some bull trout populations are migratory, spending portions of their life cycle in larger rivers or lakes before returning to smaller streams to spawn, while others complete their entire life cycle in the same stream. They can grow to more than 20 pounds in lake environments and live up to 12 years. Under exceptional circumstances, they can live more than 20 years.

Range-wide, bull trout have declined due to habitat degradation and fragmentation, blockage of migratory corridors, poor water quality, past fisheries management, and the introduction of non-native species such as brown, lake, and brook trout. While bull trout occur over a large area, many of the populations are small and isolated from each other, making them more susceptible to local extinctions.

A notice of availability of the draft recovery plan for the Jarbidge River population of bull trout was published in today's Federal Register. Public comments on the draft plan will be accepted until October 29, 2004. They may be mailed to Bob Williams, Field Supervisor, U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, Nevada Fish and Wildlife Office, 1340 Financial Blvd., Suite 234, Reno, Nevada 89502-7147. A **public information meeting** on the draft recovery plan for the Jarbidge River population will be scheduled during the public comment period. Notice of the meeting time and location will be announced in local newspapers once arrangements have been finalized.

When the public comment period on the draft recovery plan closes, the Service will temporarily stop work on recovery planning pending completion of the 5-year review.

The draft recovery plan, maps, fact sheets, photographs and other materials related to today's announcement may be found on the Pacific Region's Bull Trout Website at <http://species.fws.gov/bulltrout>. Video of bull trout is available to television stations by calling our Regional External Affairs Office at 503-231-6121.

The U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service is the principal Federal agency responsible for conserving, protecting and enhancing fish, wildlife and plants and their habitats for the continuing benefit of the American people. The Service manages the 95-million-acre National Wildlife Refuge System which encompasses 544 national wildlife refuges, thousands of small wetlands and other special management areas. It also operates 69 national fish hatcheries, 64 fishery resource offices and 81 ecological services field stations. The agency enforces Federal wildlife laws, administers the Endangered Species Act, manages migratory bird populations, restores nationally significant fisheries, conserves and restores wildlife habitat such as wetlands, and helps foreign governments with their conservation efforts. It also oversees the Federal Assistance program that distributes hundreds of millions of dollars in excise taxes on fishing and hunting equipment to state fish and wildlife agencies.

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